



and challenges to Indonesian democracy based on socio-historical perspectives. Finally, it will also discuss about the prospect of democracy under Indonesia's current president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

#### The Socio-Historical Development of Democracy in Post-Soeharto Indonesia

Sociologically speaking, Indonesia is a plural society which comprises more than 17,000 islands, 400 ethnic groups, as well as various customs, religions, and beliefs. Currently, the total population of Indonesia is around 225 millions. From this total population, Muslims represent a majority of the Indonesian populace (87.5 per cent Muslims, 7 percent Protestant, 2.5 percent Catholic, 1.5 percent Hindu, 0.5 percent Buddhist, and 1 percent other belief/animism). Despite the fact that the majority of the Indonesian populace are Muslims, it is clear that Indonesia is not an Islamic TD 9.5 per

Throughout the process of history and development, Muslims were able to develop mutual respect, understanding, and tolerance toward others. Having experienced this, the development of Islam in Indonesian is in a sense different to that in the Middle East.

Discussing the socio-historical development of Islam and democracy in Indonesia, one could discuss briefly about Soekarno's policy in implementing 'Demokrasi Terpimpin' (Guided Democracy) in late 1950s. Accordingly, this founding father and then the first president of Republic of Indonesia considerably shifted his political orientation from nationalistic and democratic to be authoritarian and dictatorship. Moreover, Soekarno finally became close with the PKI (The Indonesian Communist Party), creating major difficulties for Indonesian Muslims in expressing their aspirations for political Islam. In fact, under Soekarno's Guided Democracy Indonesia slipped into a

There is no doubt to state here that Soeharto's approach to Islam was too coercive in the early years of his administration. However, despite his coercive approach, Soeharto accommodated some Muslim religio-cultural aspirations in the late 1970s. This shift appeared to be part of a "political balancing act" that aimed to increase his political image and support of Indonesian Muslims. This balancing act led to further shifts in the late 1980s, when Soeharto began to fully develop the politics of accommodation, beginning his embracement to political Islam. After cautiously starting with the accommodation of cultural Islam, Soeharto's New Order regime later also formally institutionalized political Islam. One of the most important forms of institutionalizing political Islam was the establishment of ICM (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia / The Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals), which was to play a significant role in the discourse on political Islam in the New Order regime. Having succeeded in embodying political Islam into the state policy, Soeharto moved on to implement the politics of co-optation in the mid 1990s. Soeharto's politics of co-optation led to the conversion of a state-sponsored political Islam in the late years of his regime. Consequently, the state was neither in favor with the spirit of legal-exclusive model nor substantive-inclusive model of political Islam.

and the withdrawal of critical Muslims support to the New Order authoritarian regime, Soeharto's administration was finally collapse on 21 May 1998.

Soon after the collapse of the Soeharto regime, Indonesia was marked by the so-called "euphoric reformasi" (reform euphoria). Soeharto was replaced by Habibie who was previously chairman of ICMI and then Vice President. Under the reformasi era, people were too enthusiastic in celebrating freedom after being ruled by Soeharto's

most prominent Muslim intellectuals representing “liberal Islamic thought”, although his social base is traditionalist NU.

Yudhoyono (SBY), resigned from the cabinet due to the internal conflict between the two leaders. SBY then decided to run for president and he was able to defeat Megawati by gaining significant vote. As a result, when SBY became president and ruled the country (September 2004-October 2009), Megawati and her party, PDI (The Indonesian Democratic Struggle Party) became opposition group challenging SBY's administration.

### Challenges to Democracy

Meanwhile, it is crucial to note here that democracy in post-Soeharto's New Order regime, Indonesia faces serious challenges to the rise and spread of radical conservative Islamic (RCI) groups. Unlike moderate Muslim organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah, the RCI groups pose a threat to the government and Muslim communities need to enforce shari'a within the state constitution, law, and regulation. This agenda is not only controversial in terms of local-level consequences, but also threatens the future of Indonesia as a nation state and plural society, comprising ethnic, customary, religious and other diversities. In fact, the RCI groups define shari'a based on literal, strict, and exclusive interpretations. Moreover, those RCI groups seek to transform religio-political thoughts from the Middle East, particularly the ideology of conservative and radical Islam to Indonesia. This fact can be observed from the ideology of radical conservative Islam (RCI) movements such as Majelis Mujahiddin Indonesia, Hizbut Tahrir, Lasykar Hizbullah, Lasykar Jundullah, Darul Islam, Ikhwanul Muslimin Hammas, and the like.<sup>5</sup>

By and large, there are two main characteristics of RCI groups in Indonesia. The first is related to RCI's strict, legal, and exclusive "shari'a minded" mindsets. In this regard, most RCI groups claim that shari'a is the only solution to solving Indonesia's multi-dimensional crisis. Thus, shari'a is perceived as a panacea that would be able to create a better Indonesia in the future. Problems arise as certain RCI groups justify the use of violence in demanding the implementation of shari'a, which sometimes victimizes their fellow Muslims or non-Muslims. As a result, this kind of agenda is not only upsetting the non-Muslims communities, but also worrying to the majority of moderate Indonesian Muslims. There is also a tendency for the RCI to capitalize certain religio-

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<sup>5</sup> See Azyumardi Azra, "Militant Islam Movements in Southeast Asia : Socio-Political and Historical Context" Kultur, Vo.3, No.1, pp. 17-27.





In relation to the formalization of strict legal, and exclusive shari'a posed by the RCI groups, it is important to note here that in certain Indonesian provinces, local administrations have been implementing the so-called shari'a-based bylaws (Perda Syariah) into their local district regulations. Currently, there are several regions and cities that have implemented certain aspects of shari'a: Pamekasan (East Java), Maros, Sinjai, Bulukumba, Gowa (South Sulawesi), Cianjur, Garut, Tasikmalaya, Indramayu (West Java), Banjarmasin (Kalantan), Padang (West Sumatra), and others. It seems that those local administrations made the decision of the central government in Jakarta which allows them to have greater regional autonomy (Otonomi Daerah). These local administrations seemed to consider that such autonomy means an opportunity to implement certain aspect of Islamic shari'a, although the degree of conservatism is different one to other districts or regencies.

In fact, the inclusion of shari'a-based bylaws within the local administrations is mainly related to regulations concerning Muslims obligation to maintain their daily life such as wearing of Islamic dress, regulating collection and distribution of zakat (tithe), performing prayers and reciting Qur'an, and allocating more time for religious education to be taught in schools. However, there are also certain strict regulations that limit Muslim women's activities such as the obligation to wear the veil for Muslim and prohibition against them going outside after 5pm without being accompanied by their muhrim (family/relatives). In fact, such regulations resulted several victims in Aceh, Padang, and Tangerang after the local RCI groups raided several women considered as offenders against the regulations. According to the data released by NGO institutions, in 2007 there were approximately 78 Perda Syariah in 52 Indonesian districts and municipalities.<sup>7</sup>

### The Prospect of Indonesian Democracy

Despite offensive strategy of RCI groups in demanding the implementation of shari'a, it is clear that their agenda opposing the shari'a has little prospect for the future. This is because Indonesian Muslims are more realistic in solving their problems

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<sup>7</sup> See Robin Bush, "Regional Shari'a Regulation: Anomaly or Symptom?" in Greg Fealy and Sally White, *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008), p176. .

and for the most part disregard the shari'a imposed by the RCI groups. Contrary to the dream of RCI groups that the shari'a is a panacea, the majority of Indonesian Muslims consider that the shari'a would not be able to overcome Indonesia's multi dimensional crisis. More importantly, the Indonesian Muslims recognize that the extreme views of RCI groups have led to justifications for the use of violence which are not rooted within the traditions and existing condition of Indonesia. Consequently, demands for the implementation of shari'a and justifications for the use of violence are counterproductive for the future of Indonesia as a plural society. In this regard, noted historian M.C. Ricklefs rightly argues that the radical Islamic movements have no prospect of winning political power in Indonesia. In contrast, the spirit of moderate, tolerant, liberal, and pluralistic Islam is strongly institutionalized in Indonesia.<sup>8</sup>

In relation to the above discussion, it is important to note that since 2002 there are certain elites, conservative groups, and opportunist politicians who have enforced the implementation of the so-called shari'a-based bylaws (Perda Syari'ah) in certain Indonesian provinces, cities, and municipalities due to certain political interest and power struggle within local administrations. Interestingly enough, some regencies often claim a dramatic drop in crime and note that the regional income has increased significantly since the laws were implemented. Fortunately, moderate Muslim leaders from both Muhammadiyah and NU have warned the public about the implications of shari'a based bylaws for democratization. Syafi'i Maarif, former chairman of Muhammadiyah and leading Muslim intellectual, for instance, reminded Indonesian Muslims that shari'a based bylaws would weaken democracy and create national disintegration.

Meanwhile, NU has stated its formal opposition to shari'a-based bylaws. In NU's ulama conference in Surabaya last July, Sahal Mahfudz, chief of the NU lawmaking body Syuriah, said that the NU needs to reaffirm its commitment to Indonesia's secular traditions as a way to repress movements that would use shari'a as a basis for drafting legislation. Mahfudz pointed out that the NU hopes pluralism in line with Pancasila as a state ideology: "We oppose the implementation of shari'a-based bylaws because this

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<sup>8</sup> M.C. Ricklefs, "Islamizing Indonesia: Religion and Politics in Singapore's Giant Neighbour", Public



issue. It is not only related to the issue of Islam and democracy but it also deals with the leadership and economic problems. In this respect, it is safe to argue that leadership and economic troubles would be contributing to the future of Islam and democracy in Indonesia.

It is hoped that the victory of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) in the 2009 general election will be able to consolidate Indonesian democracy, particularly due to the fact that SBY gained 65% of the vote. Moreover, SBY is able to build strong support and a solid coalition with several leading political parties, including Islamic parties. He has also recruited several elite and leading figures of coalition parties to be members in his administration. Meanwhile, SBY's Democratic Party has gained a majority of seats in the parliament. SBY is also committed to the success of his administration and has issued what is now popularly known as the "100 Day Work Program". It seems that SBY would like to show the Indonesian people that his second administration is trustworthy and able to create a success story for Indonesia as a historical legacy to be recalled by the next generation.

Notwithstanding these achievements, current developments in Indonesian politics also show another trend: the decline of support for SBY's administration. SBY is now facing serious concerns over rampant corruption. These threaten to devastate his image of a president committed to eradicating corruption, to conducting good governance and implementing law enforcement. In terms of court mafia, SBY is unable to control both the police and prosecutor head offices, which many people suspect are involved in corruption and bribery scandals. Moreover, people are also disappointed with SBY for his indecisive standpoint concerning the ongoing conflict between KPK (The Commission for Eradication of Corruption), and the police and attorney general head offices. Facing this reality,

Rumors have been spreading widely that SBY's Democratic Party has also received funding from government policy "to secure" the bankruptcy of Century bank through a bailout policy. Interestingly, the government's bailout policy was decided by former Governor of Central Bank Boediono (currently Vice President of Indonesia) and Sri Mulyani Indrawati (Minister of Finance). These two leading figures are the most trusted economic experts in SBY's team, and they are highly expected to propel Indonesia's economy to success in the years ahead. Speculation now spreading that the Democratic Party utilized funding for the presidential election in July 2009, which led to the winning of SBY-Boediono as running mates. Political pressure is intensifying due to a document revealed by an NGO called Bendera (People's Democracy Defense), which declared that SBY's winning team and his son received significant funding from Century bank during the 2009 general election. President SBY has countered that such rumors and suspicions are baseless and are part of political conspiracy against him. Facing this reality, SBY allowed the authorities and parliament to openly investigate the Century bank scandal. Currently, the parliament has just established a special team to investigate the case, although many people are skeptical due to the fact that parliament is dominated by Democrat members and their political allies.

parliament has been able to successfully challenge the government. Evidence shows that during the period 2004-09 (the first period of SBY's administration), parliament members were pragmatic and became involved with party interests and political deals with the ruling party.

Meanwhile, there is also speculation that the Century bank scandal could lead to socio-economical unrest as well as political turmoil which are heading to the rise of a people's power movement. This kind of speculation is also dubious, considering that so far there is no indication that civil society movements are united and able to mobilize mass support. It must be noted that the media is currently showing strong support for civil society movements' criticisms of SBY's administration; however, it is also crucial to state here that the Indonesia military is still solid and in favor with SBY who is previously also a general and military man.

#### Concluding remarks

The central question is that, given the current political developments, what might be the future of Indonesian democracy? To answer this question, one should realize that although SBY has been able to maintain his administration and secure his power, he is now facing a great many challenges and obstacles in the early months of his second term of rule. Ironically, SBY recently gained an overwhelming majority from the people in the democratic, fair, and transparent general election. The 2009 general election and the winning of SBY have indeed become benchmarks of democratization in post-Soeharto Indonesia. However, it is unfortunate that due to the Century bank scandal and the President's indecisiveness, democracy and political trust could receive a severe setback. More seriously, international media such as The Economist, The New York Times, The Asian Wall Street Journal, and Asia Times have also focused on what they call a "political scandal" which is seriously threatening SBY's economic reform agenda. In this regard, at this very moment corruption issues and political scandals are setting train a process of what is predicted by Azyumardi Azra, a noted Muslim scholar, as "de-legitimization of democracy in Indonesia".<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See, Azyumardi Azra, "Delegitimasi Demokrasi di Republik Indonesia 2009."

Finally, it is safe to argue that the development of Indonesian politics create a paradox trend. In one side, there are positive trends which improve the quality of democracy. On the other side, it is clear that there are serious challenges to democracy that need to be taken into consideration. Meanwhile, despite civil society movements are now pressuring President SBY due to Century bank scandal, it is likely that people's power will be endangering the future of President SBY's administration. However, it is important that President SBY resolves Century bank scandal and other national problems. Only then can we view the future of Indonesian with a firmly optimistic outlook.